



Code of Conduct

Revision Number	Date	Amendment
00	December 2021	New Policy

Purpose of the Code of Conduct.

Stour Vale Academy Trust has an ethos that is based on trust, transparency and collaboration. In this Code of Conduct we aim to be transparent about the behaviours we expect from the people involved in our organisation. In this way we hope not only to communicate our expectations, but also make real our values.

The Code of Conduct sets down expectations in terms of behaviours, and some examples of conduct that the Trust considers unacceptable but cannot provide a complete checklist of what is, or is not, appropriate behaviour. In areas where no specific guidance is given, those under the scope of the Code are expected to consider their decisions and actions and measure them against the values of the Trust before they act.

The Trust believes that the Seven Principles of Public Life, also known as the Nolan Principles, form a sound guide to the way in which those employed by, or otherwise involved with the Trust should conduct themselves

Scope.

This Code of Conduct applies to all employees of Stour Vale Academy Trust, in member schools and centrally, for whom this Code forms part of the terms and conditions of their employment. Workers who are not employed by the Trust, whether volunteers or contractors, are expected to adhere to the Code.

Schools, and the Central Team, may agree further local expectations, which should be appended to this document. Schools are encouraged to agree these appendices with staff and governors locally. Similarly, schools may also develop local codes of practice relating to areas of this Code, but these should provide local interpretation of the Code, and should not in any way weaken the standards set here.

Responsibilities.

Leaders in schools and the Trust are expected to make the Code of Conduct available, ensuring that staff in their establishment are aware of the Code and feel able to ask any questions about it to ensure that they can meet the expectations. Leaders should also ensure that volunteers and others working in their establishment understand the expectations placed on them by this Code.

Staff in member schools and the Central Team are expected to read the Code and ensure that their actions and decisions are consistent with the spirit of the Code of Conduct. This document is not a prescriptive guide to what employees should and should not do. It highlights the principal responsibilities of employees and is a framework for behaviour. Employees should ensure they are familiar with the specific policies that underpin these behaviours and seek advice where necessary.

Our communities have a right to expect the highest standards from those involved in the education and care of children and young people within Stour Vale Academy Trust, who must act in ways that do not cause their honesty or integrity to be questioned. The Trust reserves the right to monitor the behaviour of staff in accordance with relevant legislation in order to ensure that these expectations are met.

The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Trust believes that the Seven Principles of Public Life are fundamental to the confidence that stakeholders should have in all those involved with the Trust. These principles are in accord with the values of the Trust and should guide the ways in which decisions are made and actions are taken.

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs. General.

Those involved in the Trust, at whatever level, will be accountable for the way in which their conduct and decisions reflect these principles.

The Code of Conduct.

General.

People involved in Stour Vale should comply with the terms of their engagement, whether this is through an employment contract or not. This includes expectations of regular and punctual attendance.

The Local Governing Bodies of member schools will adopt this Code of Conduct, and may add guidance that provides local context provided that these appendices do not contradict the standards set out in the main body of this document. Any local appendices will be consulted on locally and applicable only to staff and others in the school(s) to which they relate. The Local Governing Body will also ensure that any local appendices are held centrally by the Trust for reference.

This Code of Conduct forms part of the terms and conditions of employment for staff of Stour Vale Academy Trust, whether in member schools or part of the Central Team, and all those involved in the business of the Trust are expected to comply with the Code. Any locally agreed additions must also be respected by those employed to work in that establishment.

In order to protect the values, the Trust or school may find it necessary to use its disciplinary procedures where the expectations of this Code of Conduct are not met. This could lead to dismissal in serious cases.

Good attendance, including timekeeping and compliance with any local requirements for signing in / out or notification of lateness is a fundamental expectation of all employees, as failure to attend as expected creates additional pressures for colleagues and adversely affects pupils.

All absence, whether from paid or voluntary work should be notified in advance, and in the case of employees, authorised. The exception is unplanned absence, such as sickness, which should be reported in the manner required in the workplace and covered after the event by appropriate notification or medical certification where necessary (e.g. in employment).

Employees must adhere to the school's Health and Safety policy, procedure and guidance and must ensure that they take every action to keep themselves and everyone in the workplace safe and well. This includes taking immediate safety action in a potentially harmful situation (either at school or off-site) by complying with statutory and school guidelines and collaborating with colleagues and other appropriate agencies.

Employees should comply with any relevant professional standards in all their work and must not misuse or misrepresent their position, qualifications or experience or bring the reputation of the school or Trust into disrepute.

Staff must not allow their personal or political beliefs to interfere with their work.

Employees should satisfactorily comply with instructions given for carrying out the functions of their employment and any reasonable request relating to their function by an authorised manager.

Treating other people with dignity and respect

All employees of Stour Vale are expected to treat other colleagues, pupils and external contacts, such as parents, with dignity and respect and to comply with the Trust's equality policies.

All roles in Stour Vale and member schools are “public offices” as our activities are funded by public money. As such, the Seven Principles of Public Life provides sound guidance on the standards expected when dealing with others.

Harassment or bullying, discriminatory, threatening, aggressive or violent behaviour or language are not permitted, and acts of abuse, discrimination, harassment, or bullying may result in disciplinary action.

Confidential personal or financial information of any pupil, parent, carer, colleague or other contact at work should not be disclosed to a third party except under formal arrangements for information sharing, or as required by law, and covered by the Trust’s privacy notices.

... the community and service users

Employees should provide efficient, impartial and courteous service to individuals and groups within the community and should respond positively and openly to any questions about the activities of the Trust or member schools. Due regard should be given to confidentiality.

Actions, decisions and communication with others should reinforce public confidence in Stour Vale Academy Trust and member schools and should in no way weaken or erode that trust.

... pupils

All roles in Stour Vale and member schools are positions of trust, and it is important that pupils and their parents / carers can have confidence that we hold the welfare and best interests of children paramount in our decision making and actions.

Employees are expected to interact with children in an open and transparent way that would not lead any reasonable person to suspect their actions or intent. This means that individuals must avoid any behaviour that might cause an observer to have concerns, this is particularly important in relation to staff providing personal care, or dealing with pupils on a one-to-one basis.

All staff have a responsibility to read and understand the relevant parts of the current edition of Keeping Children Safe in Education, and the Trust / school policies on Safeguarding and Child Protection. Amongst other requirements all staff should:

- Take care that their own behaviour always meets expectations in this regard;
- Report through the appropriate channel any incident or behaviour that falls short of the required standard, or in other ways causes concern for the safety and welfare of children.

In exercising these responsibilities employees at all levels should be aware that it is not just concerns that meet the harms threshold which should be reported. It is vital that an immediate report is made where there is a concern that an individual has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child and/or;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child and/or;
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children; and/or
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

The term ‘low-level’ concern does not mean that it is insignificant, it means that the behaviour towards a child does not meet the harms threshold (above). Low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a ‘nagging doubt’ - that an adult working in or on behalf of the school or trust may have acted in a way that:

- is inconsistent with the staff Code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work; and
- does not meet the allegations threshold or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being over friendly with children;
- having favourites;
- taking photographs of children on their mobile phone;
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door; or,
- using inappropriate sexualised, intimidating, or offensive language.

Such behaviours are to be avoided, but might occur innocently, or thoughtlessly, or be context specific, but they may be part of a pattern of behaviour leading to abuse, and we will deal with each referral on its merits.

Any action or decision that impacts adversely on the safety or welfare of children, or is contrary to relevant policies on Safeguarding, Child Protection and Health & Safety may be considered to breach that trust and could lead to disciplinary action being taken.

...colleagues

Behaviour in the workplace should embody the Stour Vale values of trust, transparency and collaboration, and all decisions and actions should be weighed against these values.

This means there is a collective and individual responsibility for maintaining the values. This should not stifle open and honest discussion, and complaints or suggestions from staff will be welcomed when they are presented in a positive and constructive manner, in accordance with the Trust's values. Any action that is deemed to be contrary to the core values of the Trust may result in disciplinary action. There are established grievance procedures for dealing with complaints from employees about their colleagues or managers that cannot be resolved informally.

Where identity cards / badges are issued these should be always worn visibly, unless this presents a health & safety risk.

Some roles require personal protective equipment to be used to ensure the health & safety of the wearer and others, it is imperative that such PPE is used in accordance with requirements.

Certain behaviours that are acceptable in private life may cause offence to others in the workplace, or make them uncomfortable, and should be avoided. Consequently:

- Employees should dress appropriately for their work, and should not neglect their personal hygiene to such an extent that it is offensive to their fellow employees or others with whom they come into contact;
- Smoking, including vaping, is not permitted on any of the Trust's premises. Employees are asked to respect others wishing to enter or leave the site (eg by ensuring that entrances are not blocked). Cigarette ends, etc., are to be disposed of with proper care and without littering. Local arrangements may be made for designated smoking areas offsite;
- Gambling or the taking of illegal drugs or other non-prescribed psychoactive substances is not permitted.
- The drinking of alcohol on Trust premises is not permitted, except on agreed occasions, e.g. school social events. Trust funds are not to be used for the purchase of alcohol;

- All employees are expected to attend work without being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs or other psychoactive substances.

Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

Those employed by Stour Vale Academy Trust, or otherwise involved in its business, are expected to avoid conflict of interest between their role in the Trust and any involvement in other activities.

To this end, membership or affiliation to any group or organisation that could be considered to be in conflict with their duty to the Trust and / school, and where their relationship with any individual(s) might cause a conflict with such duties should be declared. Membership of a trade union or staff representative group would not need to be declared.

...in dealing with contracts and services

All contracts and business arrangements between the Trust and other organisation or individuals must be awarded on merit. Those involved in the process should take care to ensure that they follow the Trust's Financial Procedures Manual and cannot be seen as exercising favouritism in favour of businesses owned or run by friends, family members, or business associates. Neither should any illegal discriminatory practice be exercised in the tendering process.

Any financial or other interest in, or association with an organisation or individual with which the Trust has an existing or proposed contract must be declared. This should normally result in the removal of any involvement in the procurement or management of such a contract. If the skills and knowledge of the individual means their involvement is essential, suitable supervision arrangements must be put in place to guarantee the integrity of the process.

Confidential information regarding the award of contracts, or processes intended to determine the award of contracts, should not be disclosed to any unauthorised person or organisation.

Offers of payment, hospitality, or other inducement from individuals or organisations doing business with the Trust, or hoping to do so, should normally be refused, with the exception of those items specifically identified below, which may be accepted and do not have to be included in the Register of Gifts and Hospitality:

- Low cost, functional items suitable for business use rather than personal use and displaying the supplier's logo with an individual value of £10 e.g. diaries, calendars and pens.
- Gifts offered by parents or pupils to school staff to express their thanks, such as boxes of chocolates, however, only gifts with an individual value of £10 or less may be accepted.
- Hospitality in the form of meals and drinks offered by a business contact is acceptable only where it forms part of a normal business meeting (for example, refreshments at training events or meals at evening meetings).

For the avoidance of doubt gifts of money from any source must always be refused.

In order to ensure full openness and accountability, all other gifts and hospitality received should be declared and entered on the gifts and hospitality register maintained by each establishment.

Any fee paid for work done by an employee of the Trust in the course of their employment must be paid to the Trust.

Apart from participating in concessionary schemes arranged by the Trust / school, trades unions or other such groups for their members, employees shall not use school business contacts for acquiring materials or services at trade / discount prices for non-school activities.

...in dealing with other parts of the Trust

Stour Vale is a locally based organisation providing universal services in education to its communities. As such it is likely that some staff of the Trust, and others involved in its activities, are also going to be users of the Trust's services. When acting as a private individual in, for instance, seeking a school place for a child, or raising a complaint with a school, there should not be an expectation of favourable treatment as a result of any professional connection to the Trust. All such matters must be dealt with in accordance with the appropriate policies as they apply to the general public and no favour, or disadvantage, should occur because of the individual's involvement with the Trust.

Personal relationships between individuals within the Trust must not be allowed to cause the integrity of anyone involved in the Trust's activities to be questioned. Appropriate professional relationships are not called into question here, but any family relationship, or close friendship outside of the work environment should be declared if this creates a potential conflict of interests as a result of line management responsibilities, involvement in recruitment or other decisions.

...in other employment.

The Trust understands that some additional paid employment, such as working for an examination board, can bring useful insight and experience into the Trust. Equally, consultancy and similar work can add value to the Trust's work.

Where this work takes place during normal working hours the arrangements should be made to have the fees / income paid into the Trust. Any additional expenses for which the Trust is reimbursed (e.g. travel) may be paid, but no other payment will be made to the individual.

Other employment, including voluntary work, must not conflict with the interests of the Trust / school and should normally take place outside of normal working hours. Such employment must not have the effect of bringing the Trust or school into disrepute, or interfering with the ability of the employee to perform their usual duties.

In order to avoid the potential for a conflict of interest, or misunderstanding, employees in schools are expected to discuss such employment with their Headteacher, (CEO for Headteachers and the Central Team) before taking it up.

If using materials developed in Stour Vale Academy Trust and member schools it should be understood that the Trust retains the intellectual property rights / copyright and appropriate authority for its use outside the Trust should be secured in advance. No confidential information, or information related to an individual case of child protection should be disclosed.

Employees should ensure that such activities do not constitute a conflict of interest; adversely affect their primary employment by the Trust, or exceed the legal maximum working week of 48 hours as defined by the Working Time Regulations. Permission will not be unreasonably refused, particularly where there may be an identifiable benefit to the school or Trust (e.g. exam marking).

...dealing with the media

All communications with the media regarding the activities of the Trust or member schools, including social media content on the school or Trust's own sites, should be checked and authorised through the appropriate channels, and in contentious issues by the CEO or Headteacher, in liaison with the Directors, Headteacher(s) and Chairs of Local Governing Bodies. This applies whether the

stories are positive or negative and whether they are generated within the Trust or school, or are the result of media enquiries. Employees should not provide information or responses to the press, but instead refer the matter to the CEO or Headteacher, as appropriate.

Staff should not disclose sensitive information about the Trust, school, its employees, pupils, partners or governors to other parties without appropriate permission.

Where an individual member of staff may wish to contribute to a professional, academic or other publication on an issue that relates to their role they should consult the CEO or Headteacher, as appropriate, before publication.

The expression of views or giving accounts on social media is likely to be viewed in the same way as communicating with the media where the topic is related to the employee's professional role or workplace.

Use of school premises, equipment & systems

Staff should comply with any local arrangements for school / office opening hours and avoid creating additional costs and / or pressure on facilities management staff by requiring the premises to be open unnecessarily.

School equipment and systems are available for school-related activities and should not be used for the fulfilment of another job.

Any personal use of ICT equipment or systems must be in accordance with the Acceptable Use Policy. Making of long or numerous private telephone calls (and emails) is not permitted. Trust employees must not access social networking websites for personal use (i.e. non- job related use) during work time. Access to some journals, blogs and social networking sites is permitted using Trust / school equipment during work time for the purposes of undertaking job related duties only.

All users of the Trust's equipment (including laptops, mobile phones or linked devices) must ensure that they comply with security procedures relating to IT use. This includes the use of secure passwords when logging in to Trust / school systems, logging off at the end of use to avoid unauthorised access, and ensuring the passwords are not shared or made available to unauthorised persons.

Illegal, inappropriate or unacceptable use of school equipment or communication systems is not permitted. The following list of inappropriate activities is not exhaustive:

- creating, sending or forwarding any message that would reasonably be considered inappropriate or unacceptable;
- committing or implying commitment to any contractual arrangements;
- accessing, publication or circulation of illegal, offensive, unacceptable, inappropriate or non-work related material;
- any illegal activities;
- posting confidential information about the school and/or other employees, children or parents;
- gambling or gaming;
- unauthorised use of school facilities (or employee's personal IT equipment), for personal use during employee's working time.

Monitoring software will be in use on IT equipment belonging to the school / Trust, and the individual to whom the equipment is issued may be held accountable for any content or abuse detected.

Any school equipment that is used outside school premises, for example laptops, should be returned to the school when the employee leaves employment, or upon request by the Headteacher.

Staff are required to collect, maintain and dispose of sensitive or personal data in a responsible manner and to maintain confidentiality.

The deliberate falsification, alteration or unauthorised destruction of documents, including those held electronically, is not acceptable.

Behaviour out of work time

The Trust respects the right to a private life. However, it must also ensure that confidentiality and its reputation are protected. In their private life employees:

- must refrain from identifying themselves as working for the school and / or Trust, in a way which has, or may have, the effect of bringing the Trust or school into disrepute;
- must not identify other employees, children or young people without their consent;
- must not make any defamatory remarks about the school and / or Trust, its employees, children or young people, or conduct themselves in a way that is detrimental to the school.
- disclose personal data or information about the school and / or Trust, employees, children or young people, that could breach the General Data Protection Regulation (2018);
- must maintain an appropriate professional relationship with pupils and any school based employee contacted by a pupil outside of work should bring it to the Headteacher's attention (CEO for employees in the Trust's Central Team);

The above expectations apply to all environments, including on-line.

Personal Websites and Blogs

Employees who wish to set up personal webforums, 'blogs', or similar must do so outside of work, must not use school / Trust equipment and must adhere to the points detailed in the paragraph above.

Criminal actions

Employees of the Trust, and volunteers working in schools must inform their Headteacher (Chair of Local Governing Body if the employee is the Headteacher) immediately if they are subject to a criminal conviction, caution, ban, police enquiry, investigation or pending prosecution.

Employees in the Central Team should report any such issues to the CEO (Chair of Trustees if the employee is the CEO).

Those receiving such reports will take advice and consider the implications before taking any action.

Employees who fail to disclose such matters may face disciplinary action for possible gross misconduct, which could lead to them being summarily dismissed. Similarly, those working in a voluntary capacity may find their role within the school and / or Trust is withdrawn.

Gross misconduct

Gross misconduct is misconduct of such a nature that the Trust is justified in no longer tolerating the continued presence at the place of work of the employee who commits such an offence. **The**

following are examples of the kind of behaviour which can constitute gross misconduct and which could lead to summary dismissal:

- physical violence or threats of violence towards anybody;
- sexual misconduct;
- behaviour that seriously jeopardises health or safety;
- Incapacity for work due to being under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol or other psychoactive substance;
- a serious breach of trust and confidence, including behaviour that seriously damages, or may seriously damage the school's reputation;
- deliberate damage to, use of or unauthorised removal of the Trust's / school's property;
- stealing from the Academy, its pupils, parents, governors, employees or the public;
- other offences of dishonesty, including the falsification (or aiding and abetting the falsification) of subsistence and expenses claims, timesheets, etc. and the falsification of qualifications which are a stated requirement of employment or which result in financial gain.

This list is not exhaustive and the omission of any particular kind of behaviour from this list will not prevent a case of gross misconduct being taken to a disciplinary hearing if the issues are sufficiently serious.

The intention of this document is to provide a guide on acceptable standards of behaviour to staff, who should refer to relevant policies for more detail of expectations in specific circumstances and ensure that their conduct is appropriate at all times. The Academy's Disciplinary Procedure will be used where it is believed that the conduct of a member of staff may not meet the standards referred to in this document.

Links to other documents.

Stour Vale Policies.

- Grievance
- Disciplinary
- Whistleblowing
- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Health & Safety
- Gifts & Hospitality Policy

Other documents:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Academy Trust Handbook
- Stour Vale Financial Handbook
- Teachers Standards

This Code of Conduct has been drawn up in consultation with stakeholders, including Stour Vale member schools and Trades Unions.

The Code will be reviewed every three years, unless legal changes mean an earlier review is needed.